The Million Dollar Mystery

By HAROLD MAC GRATH

Illustrated from Scenes in the Photo Drama of the Same Name by the Thanhouser Film Company

CHAPTER I.

A Call in the Night.

There are few things darker than a country road at night, particularly if one does not know the lay of the land. It is not difficult to traverse a known path; no matter how dark it it, one is able to find the way by the aid of a mental photograph taken in the daytime. But supposing you have never been over the road in the day time, that you know nothing whatever of its topography, where it dips or rises, where it narrows or forks. You find yourself in the same unhappy state of mind as a blind man suddenly thrust into a strange house.

One black night, along a certain country road in the heart of New Jersey, in the days when the only good roads were city thoroughfares and country highways were routes to limbo, a carriage went forward cautiously. From time to time it careened like a blunt-nose barge in a beam sea. The wheels and springs voiced their anguish continually; for it was a good carriage, unaccustomed to such ruts and hummocks.

"Faster, faster!" came a muffled voice from the interior.

"Sir, I dare not drive any faster," replied the coachman. "I can't see the horses' heads, sir, let alone the road I've blown out the lamps, but I can't see the road any better for that."

"Let the horses have their heads; they'll find the way. It can't be much farther. You'll see lights."

The coachman swore in his teeth. All right. This man who was in such a hurry would probably send them all into the ditch. Save for the few stars above, he might have been driving Beelzebub's coach in the bottomless pit. Black velvet, everywhere black velvet. A wind was blowing, and yet the blackness was so thick that it gave to the coachman the sensation of mild suffocation.

By and by, through the trees, he saw a flicker of light. It might or might not be the destination. He cracked his whip recklessly and the

"Why, You Cherub!" Cried the Old Maid.

carriage lurched on two wheels. The man in the carriage balanced himself carefully, so that the bundle in his arms should not be unduly disturbed. His arms ached. He stuck his head out of the window.

"That's the place," he said. "And when you drive up make as little noise as you can."

"Yes, sir," called down the driver.

When the carriage drew up at its journey's end the man inside jumped out and hastened toward the gates. He scrutinized the sign on one of the posts. This was the place:

MISS FARLOW'S PRIVATE SCHOOL.

The bundle in his arms stirred and he hurried up the path to the door of the house. He seized the ancient knocker and struck several times. He then placed the bundle on the steps and ran back to the waiting carriage, into which he stepped.

"Off with you!"

"That's a good word, sir. Maybe we can make your train."

"Do you think you could find this place again?"

"You couldn't get me on this pike again, sir, for a thousand; not me!"

The door slammed and the unknown sank back against the cushions. He took out his handkerchief and wiped the damp perspiration from his forehead. The big burden was off his mind. Whatever happened in the future, they would never be able to get him through his heart. So much for the folly of his youth.

It was a quarter after ten. Miss Susan Farlow had just returned to the reception room from her nightly tour of the upper halls to see if all her charges were in bed, where the rules of the school confined them after 9:30. It was at this moment that she heard the thunderous knocking at the door.

The old maid felt her heart stop beating for a moment. Who could it be, at this time of night? Then the thought came swiftly that perhaps the parent of some one of her charges was ill and this was the summons. Stilling her fears, she went resolutely to the door and opened it.

"Who is it?" she called.

No one answered. She cupped her hand to her ear. She could hear the clatter of horses dimly.

"Well!" she exclaimed; rather angrily, too.

She was in the act of closing the door when the light from the hall discovered to her the bundle on the steps. She stooped and touched it.

"Good heavens, it's a child!"

She picked the bundle up. A whimper came from it, a tired little whimper of protest. She ran back to the reception room. A foundling! And on her doorstep! It was incredible. What in the world should she do? It would create a scandal and hurt the prestige of the school. Some one had mistaken her select private school for a farmhouse. It was frightful.

Then she unwrapped the child. It was about a year old, dimpled and golden haired. A thumb was in its rosebud mouth and its blue eyes looked up trustfully into her own.

"Why, you cherub!" cried the old maid, a strange turmoil in her heart. She caught the child to her breast, and then for the first time noticed the thick envelope pinned to the child's cloak. She put the baby into a chair and broke open the envelope.

"Name this child Florence Gray. I will send annually a liberal sum for her support and reclaim her on her eighteenth birthday. The other half of the inclosed bracelet will identify me. Treat the girl well, for I shall watch over her in secret."

Into the fixed routine of her humdrum life had come a mystery, a tantalizing, fascinating mystery. She had read of foundlings left on doorsteps —from paper covered novels confiscated from her pupils—but that one should be placed upon her own respectable doorstep! Suddenly she smiled down at the child and the child smiled back. And there was nothing more to be done except to bow before the decrees of fate. Like all prim old maids, her heart was full of unrequited romance, and here was something she might spend its floods upon without let or hindrance. Already she was hoping that the man or woman who had left it might never come back.

The child grew. Regularly each year, upon a certain date, Miss Farlow received a registered letter with money. These letters came from all parts of the world; always the same sum, always the same line—"I am watching."

Thus seventeen years passed; and to Susan Farlow each year seemed shorter than the one before. For she loved the child with all her heart. She had not trained young girls all these years without becoming adept in the art of reading the true signs of breeding. There was no ordinary blood in Florence; the fact was emphasized by her exquisite face, her small hands and feet, her spirit and gentleness. And now, at any day, some one with a broken bracelet might come for her. As the days went on the heart of Susan Farlow grew heavy.

"Never mind, aunty," said Florence; "I shall always come back to see you."

She meant it, poor child; but how was she to know the terrors which lay beyond the horizon?

* * * * * * *

The house of Stanley Hargreave, in Riverdale, was the house of no ordinary rich man. Outside it was simple enough, but within you learned what kind of a man Hargreave was. There were rare Ispahans and Saruks on the floors and tapestries on the walls, and here and there a fine painting. The library itself represented a fortune. Money had been laid out lavishly but never wastefully. It was the home of a scholar, a dreamer, a wide traveler.

In the library stood the master of the house, idly fingering some papers which lay on the study table. He shrugged at some unpleasant thought, settled his overcoat about his shoulders, took up his hat, and walked from the room, frowning slightly. The butler, who also acted in the capacity of valet, always within call when his master was about, stepped swiftly to the hall door and opened it.

"I may be out late, Jones," said Hargreave.

"Yes, sir."

Hargreave stared into his face keenly, as if trying to pierce the grave face to learn what was going on behind it.

"How long have you been with me?"

"Fourteen years, sir."

"Some day I shall need you."

"My life has always been at your disposal, sir, since that night you rescued me."

"Well, I haven't the least doubt that when I ask you will give."

"Without question, sir. It was always so understood."

Hargreave's glance sought the mirror, then the smileless face of his man. He laughed, but the sound conveyed no sense of mirth; then he turned and went down the steps slowly, like a man burdened with some thought which was not altogether to his liking. He had sent an order for his car, but had immediately countermanded it. He would walk till he grew tired, hail a taxicab, and take a run up and down Broadway. The wonderful illumination might prove diverting. For 18 years nearly, and now it was as natural for him to throw a glance over his shoulder whenever he left the house as it was for him to breathe. The average man would have grown careless during all these years; but Hargreave was not an average man; he was, rather, an extraordinary individual. It was his life in exchange for eternal vigilance, and he knew and accepted the fact.

Half an hour later he got into a taxicab and directed the man to drive downtown as far as Twenty-third street and back to Columbus circle. The bewildering display of lights, however, in nowise served to lift the sense of oppression that had weighed upon him all day. South of Forty-second street he dismissed the taxicab and stared undecidedly at the brilliant sign of a famous restaurant. He was neither hungry nor thirsty; but there would be strange faces to study and music.

It was an odd whim. He had not entered a Broadway restaurant in all these years. He was unknown. He

The Introductions Were Made.

belonged to no clubs. Two months was the longest time he had ever remained in New York since the disposal of his old home in Madison avenue and his resignation from his clubs. This once, then, he would break the law he had written down for himself. Boldly he entered the restaurant.

Some time before Hargreave surrendered to the restless spirit of rebellion, bitterly to repent for it later, there came into this restaurant a man and a woman. They were both evidently well known, for the head waiter was obsequious and hurried them over to the best table he had left and took the order himself.

The man possessed a keen, intelligent face. You might have marked him for a successful lawyer, for there was an earnestness about his expression which precluded a life of idleness. His age might have been anywhere between 40 and 50. The shoulders were broad and the hands which lay clasped upon the table were slim but muscular. Indeed, everything about him suggested hidden strength and vitality. His companion was small, handsome, and animated. Her frequent gestures and mutable eyebrows betrayed her foreign birth. Her age was a matter of importance to no one but herself.

They were at coffee when she said: "There's a young man coming toward us. He is looking at you."

The man turned. Instantly his face lighted up with a friendly smile of recognition.

"Who is it?" she asked.

"A chap worth knowing; a reporter just a little out of the ordinary. I'm going to introduce him. You never can tell. We might need him some day. Ah, Norton, how are you?"

"Good evening, Mr Braine." The reporter, catching sight of a pair of dazzling eyes, hesitated.

"The Princess Perigoff, Norton. You're in no hurry, are you?"

"Not now," smiled the reporter.

"Ah!" said the princess, interested. It was the old compliment, said in an unusual way. It pleased her.

The reporter sank into a chair. When inactive he was rather a dreamy-eyed sort of chap. He possessed that rare accomplishment of talking upon one subject and thinking upon another at the same time. So while he talked gayly with the young woman on varied themes, his thoughts were busy speculating upon her companion. He was quite certain that the name Braine was assumed, but he was also equally certain that the man carried an extraordinary brain under his thatch of salt and pepper hair. The man had written three or four brilliant monographs on poisons and the uses of radium, and it was through and by these that the reporter had managed to pick up his acquaintance. He lived well, but inconspicuously.

Suddenly the pupils of Braine's eyes narrowed; the eye became cold. Over the smoke of his cigarette he was looking into the wall mirror. A man had passed behind him and sat down at the next table. Still gazing into the mirror, Braine saw Norton wave his hand; saw also the open wonder on the reporter's pleasant face.

"Who is your friend, Norton?" Braine asked indifferently, his head still unturned.

"Stanley Hargreave. Met him in Hongkong when I was sent over to handle a part of the revolution. War correspondence stuff. First time I ever ran across him on Broadway at night. We've since had some powwows over some rare books. Queer old cock; brave as a lion, but as quiet as a mouse."

"Bookish, eh? My kind. Bring him over." Underneath the table Braine maneuvered to touch the foot of the princess.

"I don't know," said the reporter dubiously. "He might say no, and that would embarrass the whole lot of us. He's a bit of a hermit. I'm surprised to see him here."

"Try," urged the princess. "I like to meet men who are hermits."

"I haven't the least doubt about that," the reporter laughed. "I'll try; but don't blame me if I'm rebuffed."

He left the table with evident reluctance and approached Hargreave. The two shook hands cordially, for the elder man was rather fond of this medley of information known as Jim Norton.

"Sit down, boy; sit down. You're just the kind of a man I've been wanting to talk to tonight."

"Wouldn't you rather talk to a pretty woman?"

"I'm an old man."

"Bah! That's a hypocritical bluff, and you know it. My friends at the next table have asked me to bring you over."

"I do not usually care to meet strangers."

"Make an exception this once," said the reporter, who had seen Braine's eyes change and was curious to know why the appearance of Hargreave in the mirror had brought about that metally gleam. Here were two unique men; he desired to see them face to face.

"This once. My fault; I ought not to be here; I feel out of place. What a life, though, you reporters lead! To meet kings and presidents and great financiers, socialists and anarchists, the whole scale of life, and to slap these people on the back as if they were everyday friends!"

"Now you're making fun of me. For one king there are always twenty thick brogans ready to kick me down the steps; don't forget that."

Hargreave laughed. "Come, then; let us get it over with."

The introductions were made. Norton felt rather chagrined. So far as he could see, the two men were total strangers. Well, it was all in the game. Nine out of ten opportunities for the big story were fake alarms; but he was always willing to risk the labor these nine entailed for the sake of the tenth.

At length Braine glanced at his watch, and the princess nodded. Adieux were said. Inside the taxicab Braine leaned back with a deep, audible sigh.

"What it is?" she asked.

"The luck of the devil's own," he said. "Child of the Steppes, for years I've flown about seas and continents, through valleys and over mountains—for what? For the sight of the face of that man we have just left. At first glance I wasn't sure; but the sound of his voice was enough. Olga, the next time you see that reporter, throw your arms around his neck and kiss him. What did I tell you? Without Norton's help I would not have been sure. I'm going to leave you at your apartment."

"The man of the Black Hundred?" she whispered.

"The man who deserted and defied the Black Hundred, who broke his vows, and never paid a kopeck for the privilege; the man who had been appointed for the supreme work and who ran away. In those days we needed men of his stamp and to accomplish this end. . . ."

"There was a woman," she interrupted, with a touch of bitterness.

"Always the woman. And she was as clever and handsome as you are."

"Thanks. Sometimes . . ."

"Ah, yes!" ironically. "Sometimes you wish you could settle down, marry and have a family! Your domesticity would last about a month."

She made no retort because she recognized the truth of this statement.

"There's an emerald I know of," he said ruminatively. "It's quite possible that you may be wearing it within a few days."

"I am mad over them. There is something in the green stone that fascinates me. I can't resist it."

"That's because, somewhere in the far past, your ancestors were orientals. Here we are. I'll see you tomorrow. I must hurry. Good-night."

She stood on the curb for a moment and watched the taxicab as it whirled around a corner. The man held her with a fascination more terrible than any jewel. She knew him to be a great and daring rogue, cunning, patient, fearless. Packed away in that mind of his there were a thousand accomplished deeds which had roused futilely the police of two continents. Braine! She could have laughed. The very name he had chosen was an insolence directed at society.

The subject of her thoughts soon arrived at his destination. A flight of stairs carried him into a dimly lighted hall, smelling evilly of escaping gas. He donned a black mask and struck the door with a series of light blows; two, then one, then three, and again one. The door opened and he slipped inside. Round a table sat several men, also masked. They were all tried and trusted rogues; but not one of them knew what Braine looked like. He alone remained unknown save to the man designated as the chief, who was only Braine's lieutenant. The mask was the insignia of the Black Hundred, an organization with all the ramifications of the Camorra without their abiding stupidity. From the assassination of a king, down to the robbery of a country post office, nothing was too great or too small for their nets. Their god dwells in the hearts of all men and is called greed.

The ordinary business over, the chief dismissed the men, and he and Braine alone remained.

"Vroon, I have found him," said Braine.

"There are but few: which one?"

"Eighteen years ago, in St. Petersburg."

"I remember. The millionaire's son. Did he recognize you?"

"I don't know. Probably he did. But he always had good nerves. He is being followed at this moment. We shall strike quick; for if he recognized me he will act quick. He is cool and brave. You remember how he braved us that night in Russia. Jumped boldly through the window at the risk of breaking his neck. He landed safely; that is the only reason he eluded us. Millions—and they slipped through our fingers. If I could only find some route to his heart! The lure we held out to him is dead."

"Or in the fortress, which is the same thing. What are your plans?"

"I have in mind something like this."

And Hargreave was working out his plans, too; and he was just as much of a general as Braine. He sat at his library table, the maxillary muscles in his jaws working. So they had found him? Well, he had broken the law of his own making and he must suffer the consequences. Braine, who was Menshikoff in Russia, Schwartz in Germany, Mendoza in Spain, Cartucci in Italy, and Du Bois in France; so the rogue had found him out? Poor fool that he had been! High spirited full of those youthful dreams of doing good in the world, he had joined what he had believed a great secret socialistic movement, to learn that he had been trapped by a band of brilliant thieves. Kidnapers and assassinators for hire; the Black Hundred fiends from Tophet! For nearly eighteen years he had eluded them, for he knew that directly or indirectly they would never cease to hunt for him; and an idle whim had toppled him into their clutches.

He wrote several letters feverishly. The last was addressed to Miss Susan Farlow and read: "Dear Madam: Send Florence Gray to New York, to arrive here Friday morning. My half of the bracelet will be identification. Inclosed find cash to square accounts." He would get together all his available funds, recover his child, and fly to the ends of the world. He would tire them out. They would find that the peaceful dog was a bad animal to rouse. He rang for the faithful Jones.

"Jones, they have found me," he said simply.

"You will need me, then?"

"Quite possible. Please mail these and then we'll talk it over. No doubt some one is watching outside. Be careful."

"Very good, sir."

Hargreave bowed his head in his

Joined What He Believed to Be a Great Socialistic Movement.

hands. Many times he had journeyed to the school and hung about the gates, straining his eyes toward the merry groups of young girls. Which among them was his, heart of his heart, blood of his blood? That she might never be drawn into this abominable tangle he had resolutely torn her out of his life completely. The happiness of watching the child grow into girlhood he had denied himself. She at least would be safe. Only when she was safe in a far country would he dare tell her. He tried in vain to conjure up a picture of her; he always saw the mother whom he had loved and hated with all the ardor of his youth.

Many things happened the next day. There was a visit to the hangar of one William Orts, the aviator, famous for his daredevil exploits. There were two visitors, in fact, and the second visitor was knocked down for his pains. He had tried to bribe Orts.

There were several excited bankers, who protested against such large withdrawals without the usual formal announcement. But a check was a check, and they had to pay.

Hargreave covered a good deal of ground, but during all this time his right hand never left the automatic in his overcoat pocket, except at those moments when he was obliged to sign his checks. He would shoot and make inquiries afterward.

Far away a young girl and her companion got on the train which was to carry her to New York, the great dream city she was always longing to see.

And the spider wove his web.

Hargreave reached home at night. He put the money in the safe and was telephoning when Jones entered and handed his master an unstamped note.

"Where did you get this?"

"At the door, sir. I judge that the house is surrounded."

Hargreave read the note. It stated briefly that all his movements during the day had been noted. It was known that he had collected a million in paper money. If he surrendered this he would be allowed twenty-four hours before the real chase began. Otherwise he should die before midnight. Hargreave crushed the note in his

Visited the Hangar of an Aviator.

hand. They might kill him; there was a chance of their accomplishing that; but never should they touch his daughter's fortune.

"Jones, you go to the rear door and I'll take a look out of the front. We have an hour. I know the breed. They'll wait till midnight and then force their way in."

Hargreave saw a dozen shadows in the front yard.

"Men all about the back yard," whispered Jones down the hall.

The master eyed the man.

"Very well, sir," replied the latter, with understanding. "I am ready."

The master went to the safe, emptied it of its contents, crossed the hall to the bedroom, and closed the door softly behind him, Jones having entered the same room through another door to befool any possible watcher. After a long while, perhaps an hour, the two men emerged from the room from the same doors they had entered. So whispered the watcher to his friends below.

"Hargreave is going upstairs."

"Let him go. Let him take a look at us from the upper windows. He will understand that nothing but wings will save him."

Silence. By and by a watcher reported that he heard the scuttle of the roof rattle.

"Look!" another cried, startled.

A bluish glare came from the roof.

"He's shooting off a Roman candle!"

They never saw the man-made bird till it alighted upon the roof. They never thought of shooting at it till it had taken wing. Then they rushed the doors of the house. They made short work of Jones, whom they tied up like a Christmas fowl and plumped roughly into a chair. They broke open the safe, to find it empty. And while the rogues were rummaging about the room, venting their spite upon many a treasure they could neither appreciate nor understand, a man from the outside burst in.

"The old man is dead and the money is at the bottom of the ocean! We punctured his . . . She's gone!"

A thin, inscrutable smile stirred the lips of the man bound in the chair.

(Continued Tomorrow Afternoon.)

CUBA REMAINS HOT BED OF POLITICAL INTRIGUE

Approaching Elections Bring Out Factions in Numbers Never Before Equalled in Most Stormy Days.

(Associated Press Correspondence.)

Havana, Oct. [illegible]—Elections will be held in Cuba on November 1 for half the membership of the House of Representatives and certain municipal and provincial councilmen. While this is not of itself an important election it may serve as a significant preliminary to the campaign for election of a new president next year. President Menocal is on record as [illegible] against accepting a renomination and the question of who his successor will be is already becoming an interesting one in Cuba.

The present factional complications have never been equalled here. While in a broad sense there are two main parties, the Conservatives and the Liberals, at the same time there are numerous nominally independent groups whose affiliations are not defined. There is, for instance, one important offshoot of the old Liberal party made up of the "old guard" of the administration of President Jose Miguel Gomez, who recognize him as their chief and who will doubtless do their utmost to place him in the presidential chair again.

These are the Machadistas, and are of course irreconcilably opposed to the wing of the Liberal party led by Zayas, the traditional enemy of Gomez.

President Menocal in addition to his resolute stand not to accept a renomination, declares that during the remainder of his term he will carry out his own policies in his own way and not defer to this or that group or faction which offers support as the price of presidential favor, and that he will endeavor to inaugurate soon a "National" party for the amalgamation of all that is best in the Liberal and Conservative organizations.

It is certain that whoever the next Conservative or National presidential candidate may be, he will have a formidable rival in Gomez. The former president has just returned to Havana to occupy his new palace on the Prado and his candidacy will be officially declared soon after the November elections. He will then begin active work to rally the once united Liberal party which elected him in 1908. There is no question that the general enjoys a certain popularity in the island, and he will have every advantage that great wealth can bestow in conducting his campaign.

Other probable candidates mentioned this early are General Carlos Garcia Velez, minister to Great Britain, and General Emilio Nunez, who may appear in the lists with the backing of the veteran element.

Distress in the tobacco-growing regions of Havana and Pinar del Rio has become so acute that the government is at a loss to find means for relief. Many [illegible] once of enormous value for the cultivation of the finest tobacco and for [illegible] little else, have been abandoned or partly utilized for [illegible] or vegetables for the Havana market. Numerous causes are ascribed, the favorite being that the world has decreased its demand for the once coveted Cuban leaf. This has been the case particularly as concerns Europe and the present war has tended to make conditions worse. Much of the last two crops remains unsold.

A governmental commission is now [illegible] in India and the Philippines in the hope of finding some crops which may be grown with a reasonable profit on the abandoned tobacco plantations of Cuba.

The commission appointed by the government to examine into the charges of [illegible] work in the carrying out of the contract for the sewers and paving in Havana, and the charges against Chief Engineer Brooks appointed to watch the interests of the Cuban government, has nearly completed its work. It is alleged that a preliminary investigation developed upwards of one hundred complaints against Brooks of [illegible] dereliction of duty and it is alleged to officials of the government that Brooks permitted the payment of $[illegible] worth of [illegible] in excess of what the work actually done called for. It is alleged that great [illegible] were permitted by greatly lessening the amount of asphalt and concrete called for in the specifications of the contract.